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THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

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*'The Kingdom of Heaven,' 'The Theology
of Experience,' &c.*

London

THE EPWORTH PRESS

J. ALFRED SHARP

TO
MY MOTHER
MY EARLIEST TEACHER
IN THE
SCHOOL OF LIFE
WITH
GRATEFUL LOVE

First Edition 1925.

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
RUSH & WARWICK, HARPUR PRINTING WORKS, BEDFORD.

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THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

CHAPTER I

THE MEANING OF LIFE

‘**W**HAT is your life?’ That is a question which men are always asking. Whence do we come? Whither do we go? Why are we here? Sometimes we think that we have found the answer, and then we are suddenly pulled up by facts and experiences which seem to contradict it. Man’s life is bound up inseparably with that of the universe. Sometimes he seems to be lord of the world, and then again he appears to be its abject slave. Sometimes we are exalted by the thought of the greatness of man; at other times we are humbled to the dust by his meanness and baseness. There are days when life opens out before us like a beautiful landscape, and then the dark clouds of pain and sorrow and hate and death gather, and we know not what to make of life. Life gives freely and prodigally with one hand, but with the other it seems to take away, and we are puzzled. What is the meaning of life?

Some have cried that life is a curse. They have re-echoed Job’s cry, ‘Let the day perish wherein I was born.’ Desire is torture, and existence is a burden, they say. They tell us there can be no

peace for man until he enters the realms of non-existence, where 'the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.' Of this answer, it is enough to say that the human heart knows better, and has resolutely refused to accept it.

Some hold that life is an opportunity for the pursuit of pleasure and happiness. We do not know whence we come or whither we go; but we have the present, and life is full of rich resources which we are capable of enjoying. '*Carpe diem.*' 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' Do not let us bother about the meaning and value of life, but rather let us drink deep of the rich red wine which it sets before us. Let us have a good time, and leave the future to take care of itself. What shall we say in reply to this? It is sufficient to answer that, while it is undoubtedly true that happiness is one of the ends of man, we always miss it when we make the pursuit of it the chief purpose of our life. To seek for pleasure is to defeat our own end. If we want happiness, we must seek for something else, and then it comes to us unawares. What that something else is will become clear, I hope, as we proceed.

How does Jesus Christ answer the question, 'What is your life?' It is impossible to read the New Testament without coming to a very definite conclusion as to His conception of the meaning of life. He taught that it is a school in which man is being trained and fitted for a larger life in other spheres of existence. Life is a great opportunity for self-discipline, for the acquisition of

knowledge, for growth and service. This is the key to the solution of the dark riddles of life. Tennyson wrote, 'All life is a school, a preparation, a purpose: nor can we pass current in a higher college if we do not undergo the tedium of education in this lower one.'

If we are making inquiries about a school for our children, we ask, 'Who is the master, and what are his methods?' We must ask the same question in reference to the School of Life.

I have spoken of life as a school. In reality, there are many competing schools, and we are all pupils in one of them. Whatever path we choose we learn something, and are training our faculties in a particular direction. We can make nothing else of life than a school. There are schools of selfishness, worldly-wisdom, cynicism, hate, and uncharity, as well as that in which we learn the priceless lessons of love, self-sacrifice, truth, and righteousness.

The one school in which we learn to use life aright and to penetrate to its deepest meanings is that of Jesus Christ. This is so because He is the Master of life. He shows us God, and when we know God we know life. The explanation of the law of gravitation is to be found not in the earth, but in the sun. The explanation of the laws of life is to be found not in man but in God. The knowledge of God is the way to the understanding of the riddles of life, and this knowledge is given us in Jesus Christ.

I sometimes wonder how men endured the

burden of existence before Jesus came. How could they understand the meaning of life when they were certain of so little concerning God? Life's tragedies must have almost overwhelmed them, and its contradictions must have almost driven them to despair. Is it any wonder that they went all their life-time subject to fear and to bondage? It was only a few elect souls who attained to the vision of the invisible and who gained some understanding of life's hidden meaning. If the light had not all the while been shining in the darkness of men's hearts, surely they would have surrendered themselves to despair. But when Jesus came, all was changed. He made men certain of God, revealed His mind, nature, and will, and thus cast a flood of light upon the mystery of life.

What are the methods of this Master in the school of life? The first principle to be grasped is that He subordinates everything to the salvation of the soul. Until we have learned this, we shall never understand the educational methods of God. Before we pronounce an opinion on the educational methods of the schoolmaster, we ask, 'What is his aim? What kind of result is he seeking to produce?' So with God. There are lessons which we have to learn and experiences through which we have to pass which, at first sight, seem to us useless. So far from making for our present material happiness, they detract from it. But once we realize that God's supreme concern is the salvation of our souls and the triumph of our spiritual nature over all the forces of sin, then the

useless lessons are seen to be of transcendent worth, and the dark experiences are irradiated with light.

This is one of the deep secrets which we learn in the school of Jesus Christ. We complain bitterly that life imposes on us labour, toil, sacrifice, renunciation, suffering, and sorrow. But Jesus tells us that it is our own fault if we allow them to master us. We can make them our servants, for the salvation of the soul. Labour and toil may make us mere mechanical drudges, renunciation may embitter us, sorrow may cloud our spirit and rob us of our faith; but if these calamities take place, it is our own fault. Labour may be an instrument for the development of character; renunciation may be the means of enlarging our personality; and through sorrow and suffering we may win a purer, more sympathetic, and more tender soul. These are all parts of the Divine discipline. Behind them is a hidden purpose of love. Discipline which is resented spoils the character; but discipline that is welcomed and used enriches and purifies it.

God has set us here, in school, for two purposes—that we may learn and that we may grow. We are here to learn, to gain knowledge. But what is the use of that? Paul tells us that knowledge passes away. True; but there is a deeper and more abiding knowledge than that of the intellect of which he is speaking. Emerson says, 'Life is a succession of lessons, which must be lived to be understood.' We cannot learn life's greatest

lessons by reading them out of a book. We can only learn them by living them. When a youth reaches an age of discretion, he may read a book on good and evil. He may find the good described in its pages in words of wondrous power, and evil set forth in all its naked ugliness. He may read of rules for distinguishing between good and evil, and principles to guide him in his daily life. He may be provided with a list of the virtues and of the vices. He may be exhorted to prayer and the imitation of Christ. He may read and re-read the book again and again until he knows it off by heart. But no one will suppose that, because he has mastered the book he has also mastered the evil that is in his heart and in the world. He can only understand the lessons by living them out. The one way to master evil is to go out to meet it and to engage it in mortal conflict. And the battle will have to be fought not once, but a hundred times. The youth will often be wounded, and he may sometimes fall; but he must rise and fight again if the final victory is to be his. The good is not made our own by sympathetic emotion as we read of it in a book, but in so far as we embody it in our character and work in the common life. Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived in order to be learnt. We might have been made to do good like automatic machines; but we could never have learnt to love it except by having good and evil set before us, and making the good our own, even though at great cost.

How should we learn tenderness and sympathy and charity except from the experience of our sore need and of that of those who are round about us? We are here to learn. We are not all in the same standard; but sooner or later we must all assimilate the same lessons. There are no optional subjects; we must take the whole curriculum. Sometimes our course of education is cut short by death; but we never know for what work God is preparing us. He has other schools and other spheres of service than this, and He alone knows what is best for us, and best for His great purpose.

We are also here that we may grow. 'Why stay we on the earth except to grow?' We send our children to school that they may grow in wisdom and in stature. We can see them developing before our eyes, and we anxiously watch their progress. The mother says to the father, 'Did you hear what the boy said?—his mind is developing. Do you know what he did to-day?—his character is maturing.' He is learning from his books and his teachers and from association with his fellows.

I like to think that the Divine Father looks on us as children at school, and eagerly watches every sign of growth and development. He knows every child in the school by name, and He tells us in accents of infinite tenderness that while we have hard lessons to learn and the discipline is often painful, yet that is the only way of growth.

We are to grow in knowledge, in purity, in

moral beauty, in humility, in tenderness, in strength, and in love. Endless vistas of progress open out before us. We see peak after peak to be scaled, until at length we attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We have no justification for living unless we are growing.

Sooner or later we shall leave this school of earth; and if we have used our opportunities aright, we shall find ourselves equipped for the fuller and larger life upon which we shall enter.

CHAPTER II

THE MASTER OF LIFE

‘**O**NE is your Master, even the Christ.’ Jesus is the Master in the School of Life. We are often slow to realize that we need a master. We like to think that we are self-sufficient, that we are the captains of our own destiny. But life teaches us that we need some one to teach and lead and master us.

We have seen that life is a school. We have no key to the riddle of human existence, no clue to the drama that is being enacted on this planet, unless this world is a place where we have been set in order to learn and grow. But how shall we learn without a teacher? As our experience widens we are driven to realize that life is a serious thing. It sets us hard problems to solve, and imposes on us tasks which often seem impossible of fulfilment. It is easy to say that we are here in order to learn; but it must be confessed that it is difficult to penetrate the meaning of some of life’s mysteries. It is not easy to know what lessons we ought to extract from some of the bitter experiences through which we are called upon to pass. Many lengthy

treatises have been written upon the meaning and value of life; but men and women are still baffled and perplexed. The art of living is for multitudes an undiscovered art. Some there are who live and learn and conquer. But there are others who are baffled and foiled and defeated.

To exist, we have only to breathe and eat and drink; but to *live* is not easy. If we are to live, we must make certain adjustments. First of all we must adjust ourselves to God. We do not probe life to its depths till we find God. What we are depends ultimately on the relation in which we stand to God and on what we think of Him. Men live by God, and there is no other way of life. Again, we must adjust ourselves to the world in which we live. It is a world which is in many respects more our enemy than our friend. It is full of sin and enthroned wrongs and cruel sufferings and tragic sorrows and dark mysteries; and if we are to live, we must not merely resign ourselves to these things, but must find a way of triumphing over them, and of extracting from them lessons of priceless worth. We must be neither blind pessimists nor easy-going optimists, but must be able to say as the result of a vision born of experience, 'All things work together for good to them that love God.' Once again, we must adjust ourselves to our fellow men. We live in a world in which we are not alone, and in which we cannot have it all our own way. Around us are men and women of like passions unto ourselves. If we are to live, we must enter into

satisfactory relations with them. In fellowship with them we must win rich treasure for ourselves, and in intercourse with them we must wrest from life some of its deepest meanings. And, finally, we must adjust ourselves to ourselves. Every man has within him his own greatest enemy; and until that enemy is mastered, we do not know how to live. Life is a problem which we cannot solve without a teacher. It is like a rock containing precious metal, which we are unable to extract until we have found a master to show us the way.

We need a master not only to teach us, but to master us. These are days in which men are throwing off the yoke of masters. We are emphasizing the freedom and independence of every human soul. But it is one thing to throw off the yoke of masters who have no right to lord it over us; it is quite another to own no master at all. No man is his own master until he has been mastered. There are only two courses open to us—either to acknowledge a master, or to set up as being a law unto ourselves. At first sight to be a law unto ourselves seems to be the realization of perfect liberty. But there is no greater snare or delusion. To be a law to ourselves is to be slaves—the slaves of caprice or passion or inclination or self-will or conceit. God help the man who is a law unto himself! He is a prisoner, and he does not live. It may be said, on the other hand, that to acknowledge a master is to confess oneself a slave. But it all depends upon

the kind of master whom we own. There is One 'whose service is perfect freedom.' Until we have been mastered by Him, we are the slaves of the rebel in our own hearts. There is a jungle in each one of us full of untamed beasts. We are not free until we have found a master who can clear the jungle and tame the beasts. Russell Lowell speaks of the first man who 'stood God-conquered, with his face to heaven upturned.' That man, whoever he was, was the first free man, and the first pioneer of freedom. He found freedom by finding One who mastered him.

Who is there that can be compared with Jesus as Master in the School of Life? Even the world's greatest teachers have been teachers because they were learners. Jesus, too, 'increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.' But by the time He began His ministry He knew the message which He had to proclaim, and the path which He had to tread. As you read the Gospels, you say, 'This Man understands, He knows, He sees right into the heart of things.' He does not describe Himself as 'a child gathering pebbles by the sea-shore.' With sublime majesty He moves through the Gospel pages, saying, 'I know whence I come and whither I go.' He moves with the ease of faith through the mysteries and perplexities of the world. He is Master of life. His faith is no easy-going optimism. He is no hermit or arm-chair philosopher. He knows life at first hand, and there is no place in it that is hidden from His knowledge. He came into

contact with life in all its phases, and knew all sorts and conditions of men. They brought to Him such as were sick of various diseases. Many unburdened themselves to Him, and He had a matchless power of reading the human heart. What was the effect of all this upon Him? Was He crushed or cynical or despondent? No; He moved through life as the Master of Life, carrying burdens, surmounting difficulties, trampling down temptations, soothing sorrows, and illuminating mysteries. The key to the calm and triumphant faith of Jesus is to be found in His words, 'Your Heavenly Father knoweth.' He does not argue or philosophize. He simply gives utterance to the deep convictions and assurances of faith. If we put Him to the test, we shall discover that we can face life unafraid. He teaches us to wrest from life its hidden meaning, and to extract lessons of infinite worth from some of its darkest experiences.

Further, Jesus is Master because He has the secret of perfection. The great masters in music and painting and sculpture and prose and poetry are those who have the secret of perfection. They have crossed the line between talent and genius, and they leave their competitors panting and humble behind. Jesus stands alone among the world's teachers. We do not apply the term 'genius' to Him; but He is unique in His consciousness of God and in His insight into the human heart. He is 'The Way, the Truth, the Life.' But it is not only as Teacher that He is perfect. He has the secret of perfection in Him-

self. His challenge rings out along the centuries, 'Learn of Me.' The testimony of His disciple stands, 'Who did no sin, neither was any guile found in His mouth.' He is the Ideal and the Exemplar of all ages, and the supreme goal of human endeavour is to grow more like Him. And there is even more than this to be said. He has the secret of perfection in achievement. He is the one Master Sculptor of human nature. For nineteen centuries men have been bringing to Him vessels that have been broken and marred in the struggle of life, and He has remoulded and refashioned them and has made them again, other vessels according to the manifold designs of His all-comprehending love.

Finally, Jesus is the Master of Life because He is in control. It often seems to us as though the world is at the mercy of blind forces and evil personalities, but Jesus has the secret of mastery; He does not suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear. He holds the powers of evil in leash. We see not yet all things put under Him; but He is crowned, and He is slowly but steadily extending His dominion. 'All power is given unto Me,' He says. He is not speaking of any arbitrary enduement of power. The power is His because of what He is—incarnate love and holiness and righteousness and truth.

Jesus of Nazareth walks the earth to-day with the same quiet confidence and assured sense of mastery as in the days of His flesh. With the same clear and steady gaze He looks into the

anguished eyes of men and says, 'Your Heavenly Father knoweth.' He has the same mastery over the winds and waves, and to us He says, 'Be not afraid'; and to them He will say in the time of His own master-wisdom, 'Peace, be still,' and there will be a great calm. 'The government is upon His shoulders, and His name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

CHAPTER III

CONSCIENCE

WHAT do we mean by Conscience? Some of the noblest and also some of the vilest deeds recorded in history have been done in its name. Priests have led victims to the stake for conscience' sake, and the victims have gone there bravely, and even joyously, equally for conscience' sake. During the war thousands who hated war took up arms for conscience' sake, and some appeared before tribunals and sought exemption from military service, also for conscience' sake.

These contradictions should put us on our guard, and should warn us that the appeal to conscience is not quite so simple a matter as we sometimes think. In the cases which I have quoted, both parties appealed to conscience as justifying their action, and yet they cannot both have been right. It is evident that conscience can be misused, and when that takes place on any considerable scale we are tempted to say, 'A plague on all this talk about conscience. I do not believe there is any such thing.' It is therefore important for us to face the question 'What is conscience?' and what are the grounds of its authority?

The popular view of conscience is that it is an inward voice which tells us infallibly what is right and what is wrong, if we will only hearken. Socrates used to say that throughout his life he obeyed the prompting and guidance of an inward voice, which he distinctly heard. And many conceive of conscience under a like form. It is regarded as a monitor which not only warns us that there is a difference between right and wrong, but also gives us infallible guidance as to which particular actions are good and which are evil.

But a little thought will show that this view of conscience is not true to the facts of experience. If conscience is a supernatural voice—the voice of God in the soul—then we have a right to expect that it will give the same mandate to all men, whereas we find that good men continually differ from one another, for conscience' sake.

The true view of conscience is, I think, expressed in St. Paul's saying, 'To him who accounteth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.' Conscience is not a faculty which gives us infallible guidance as to what is right and what is wrong. There is undoubtedly a moral sense in us, a deep-seated instinct, which tells us we should do good and depart from evil; but it does not tell us infallibly and in detail what is good and what is evil. We must seek that guidance elsewhere, in the exercise of the powers of the reason, in the wisdom which comes from experience, in the teaching of Jesus Christ, and in fellowship with the enlightening Spirit of Truth. Conscience is the faculty

which speaks approval when we are loyal to our own conception of what is right and disapproval when we are disloyal to it. We might therefore define Conscience as an inward voice which expresses approval of actions which are in harmony with our ideals, and disapproval of such as are contrary to them. Conscience says to us, 'There is a right and there is a wrong. The difference between good and evil is a real difference. Your business is to pursue the good.' But we must discover for ourselves by the use of our intellect and by communion with God what particular actions are right and what are wrong. When we have decided on our standard, conscience says to us, 'Live up to your standard. By that standard will you be judged. "To him that accounteth anything unclean, to him it is unclean."' ¹

If this is the true view of conscience, it is important to remember that Conscience can be perverted. The New Testament speaks of a 'weak' conscience, a conscience 'seared with iron,' a 'defiled' conscience. *Conscience may pronounce approval of actions that are wrong and disapproval of actions that are right.*

² 'To him that accounteth anything unclean, to him it is unclean.' Yes; but it is necessary to look into the process whereby a man arrives at the conclusion that a particular thing is unclean. A man may go astray in his reasoning, and sincerely but ignorantly may arrive at a wrong conclusion. There is nothing more subtle than the human heart, and unconsciously our judgements are warped

by prejudice and inclination and self-interest. It is fatally easy to make our conception of right harmonize with our likes and our conception of wrong with our dislikes. Moreover, we frequently err through an excess of individualism. If you find a man with an angular and aggressive conscience, it is very often due to the fact that he gives little if any weight to the moral judgements of his fellows. Before definitely deciding whether he is to regard this or that as unclean, he does not weigh the opinions of other men. He sets his own feelings or inclinations or prejudices against the world. But if we are true and humble men we shall remember that those around us are channels of God's truth to men, and shall allow at any rate for the possibility that we may be mistaken in some of our moral judgements.

Conscience may pronounce approval of actions that are wrong and disapproval of those that are right, because it may be blinded by prejudice or inclination, or obstinacy or pride. Saul of Tarsus persecuted the Christians, thinking 'that he did God service,' that is with the approval of his conscience. Afterwards he found he had been wrong, and his conscience condemned the very same actions which it had previously approved.

Is it not rather confusing? At first sight it is, but not if we remember the definition of conscience at which we have arrived. The change which took place was not in Paul's conscience, but in the body of principles in accordance with which his conscience pronounced judgement. If our principles

and ideals are wrong, then conscience pronounces wrongly too. Do not let us make the mistake of imagining that because we are acting conscientiously we must necessarily be right. 'To him that accounteth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean'—true, but be sure that you have given sufficient thought and prayer to the subject, and that you have purged your heart of all selfishness and pride, before you come to your conclusion as to what is clean or unclean.

We must continually examine and re-examine the standards in harmony with which our conscience pronounces judgement. Had we been more sincere and humble learners at the feet of the Spirit of Truth, our conceptions of truth might have been different, and therefore the dictates of our conscience more trustworthy.

Someone has said that it is not our duty to obey conscience but to educate it. In other words we must not only render obedience to its present dictates, but must see whether it has higher commands for us. If it be asked how this can be done, the answer is clear. We must look into our minds and hearts and examine our ideals, principles, hopes, and aspirations. If the value of the verdicts of our conscience depends upon the purity and truth of our principles, then it must be our constant endeavour to follow after truth and purity. In a word, we must strive to become more and more obedient to Christ. Let a judge on the bench be called upon to pronounce judgement in accordance with a mediaeval code of law, and his judgements

will be on a low plane. But give him a modern Christian code as his standard, and his judgements will be of a higher order. Let a man's principles be of a low order, and his conscience will pronounce judgement in harmony with them; but if the guiding principles of his life be derived from Jesus Christ his conscience will judge in accordance with this higher standard, and the more fully he is baptized into Jesus Christ the more enlightened will his conscience become.

Conscience therefore does not speak in accents that are fixed; it does not always sound the same note. It is as the teacher in the school who will condemn in the fourth standard what he permitted in the first, and again will condemn in the sixth what he permitted in the fourth. Conscience recognizes the possibilities of growth that lie open to the soul, and adapts itself to every stage of development. It is ours to be ever seeking after loftier heights, and what may appear right to-day will to the soul grown purer often appear less than right to-morrow, until by the continual education of the conscience, we become possessed of a soul sensitive to discern every approach of evil—a conscience void of offence toward God and man.

CHAPTER IV.

EXPERIENCE

THOSE who are accounted most learned in the School of Life are not necessarily those who are held to be scholars when judged by university standards, but those who are rich with the wisdom of experience. We come under the tuition of many teachers as we pursue our way from the cradle to the grave. Our parents, our teachers in church, school, and university, our brothers, sisters, friends, and business associates, newspapers, books, music, and pictures—all these teach us many things and make us their debtors. But the greatest teacher in the School of Life is Experience.

What do we mean by Experience? As the word is commonly used, it has a two-fold meaning. It signifies in the first place practical acquaintance gained by trial or experience, and secondly the fruit of the knowledge so obtained.

Lord Bacon, you will remember, said that we ought not to begin by evolving theories about Nature and then try to make the facts square with them; but that we should patiently question Nature, make experiments with her, so that thus we might slowly

accumulate facts which have been verified and set in their right relation to one another. Having done that, we are in a position to formulate a theory. We must adapt the theory to the facts, and not the facts to the theory. Science learns by experiment. Its appeal is always to experience.

And what is true of Nature is true also of life and of religion. You can only discover life's deepest meanings and learn life's greatest lessons by living. Your life is a most thrilling experience, and you will only grow wise as you gather up and assimilate the results of the experiment in your own case and in that of men in general. So with religion. If you are to learn its deepest secrets and verify its profoundest truths, you must make trial of it, you must pursue the method of experience. You must sit at the feet of experience. 'If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God.'

If you ask me for a definition of life, I should say that it is *the school of experience*. Life is an experience from the very beginning. The infant throws his limbs about and grabs at this or that. What is he doing? He is making experiments. He is trying to discover the use of his limbs and to co-ordinate their actions, and he becomes wise by experience. When he goes to school, his whole course of education is a series of experiments. I remember that when I was at school, sometimes on the day when we were to have a chemistry lesson an excited whisper would pass through the

class, 'We are to have experiments to-day.' No dry bookwork, but all the colours of the rainbow and explosions! But if we had only known it, we were making experiments every day in all our classes. The master showed us a Latin author. The pages were meaningless to us. Then he showed us a Latin grammar, and he said, 'If you learn these declensions and conjugations and rules of syntax, you will be able to understand that Latin writer.' What did we do? We made the experiment, and we learned by experience. The master covered the board with mysterious x's and y's and plus and minus. He said, 'If you will follow the rules which I will give you, you will be able to solve many mathematical problems far more easily than by the ordinary methods of arithmetic.' What did we do? We made the experiment, and we learned by experience. So I might multiply illustrations of the experiments which we made both in school and out of school. And some of the lessons which we learned we have never forgotten and never shall forget. They seem to us now to be axioms—self-evident truths; but we learned them by experience.

And when we passed from school into the wider arena of life, we still made experiments. Some of those which we worked out on a small scale at school, we now carry through on a larger scale. For instance, each one of us remembers the great experiment of the Garden of Eden. You think of that story in Genesis iii. as a piece of dead history or as a beautiful legend. But you are wrong. It

is neither. It is the record of an experiment that is being worked out every day in the laboratory of life. Have you not had experience of the subtlety of sin? Has it not come to you suggesting false arguments and treacherously promising false gains? Has it not made a powerful appeal to your appetites and your senses and intellect? Has not evil seemed very pleasant to your eyes, and have you not tasted it, only to discover that it leaves a bitter savour in your mouth? What does it mean? It means that you have experimented with good and evil. You have tasted of each. Your knowledge of them is not theoretical; it is practical and experimental. You know for yourself what sin is, and what its consequences are. No one can persuade you that that flaming sword which turns every way to guard the way to the tree of life is a myth. You have seen it when the sense of sin has lain heavy upon you, and your conscience witnesses that it was no phantom that you saw. Again, you know what good is, and what are the consequences of good. No one can persuade you that there is no difference between a good conscience and an evil conscience. You have made the great experiment. You have tried both: and if you have learned your lesson, you know which you prefer.

In other ways, too, we are making experiments—some voluntary and some involuntary. We experiment with pain, and we experiment with pleasure; and we learn more from our experience than any one can teach us. We experiment now with

poverty and now with riches or comparative riches. And let me say, too, poverty and riches experiment with us, and reveal to us and to others the nature of the material of which we are made.

And many are compelled to make experiment of sorrow. For years, perhaps, they had known sorrow as a hard fact of life, but they had no personal and practical acquaintance with it. Then suddenly sorrow knocks at their door and forces an entrance. They are compelled to make experiment of sorrow, whether they will or not. They must put the cup to their lips and drink it to the dregs. And much depends for their future on the result of the experiment. They may emerge from their close and unwilling fellowship with sorrow, soured and hardened and embittered, or they may be perfected through their experience.

Our race has been in the school of experience for thousands of years, and as a result it has learned many lessons. Humanity is a unity, a solidarity, and the lessons learned by each generation are in a sense transmitted to those that come after it. Turn to the great masterpieces of literature, and you will find there, not merely the thoughts and opinions of individual writers, but the stored-up wisdom of the ages. Shakespeare was original and creative. You find that his knowledge of human nature is simply astounding. But the secret of his greatness lies in the fact that he was the interpreter of the experience of all the generations. Or turn to history, with its record of tragedies and comedies, of joy and sorrow, of victory and

defeat, of heroism and cowardice, of self-sacrifice and selfishness—you will find it to be nothing else than the record of the experience of the race. 'These things,' says Paul, as he surveys the history of his nation, 'these things were written for our admonition.' They were written that the generations to come might learn from the experience of the generations that are past.

And there are some things which we are tempted to think that humanity has learned never to unlearn through its many vicissitudes and experiences. Let me name some of them. 'The wages of sin is death.' 'Sovereignty is transferred from nation to nation because of iniquities and deeds of violence and greed of money.' 'The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.' 'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.' These and many other truths are written in letters of fire on the pages of history; they have been proved, and proved again and again, not theoretically, but practically and experimentally.

Yet the fact remains that each generation and each individual has to learn them over again for itself or himself. Men do not seem to grasp these great truths until they have proved them by bitter experience, as our generation has good cause to know. We do not start wholly afresh. The impulses of the generations crowd in upon us from behind. We cannot shut our eyes altogether to the thousands who have gone before us who have made the same experiment; but none the less we

are bound to make the experiment for ourselves, if we are to learn and (what is more important) assimilate and apply the truth.

It is one of the most pathetic facts of life that no one can endow another with his own experience. A father may have had few educational advantages himself, but at great self-sacrifice he gives his lad the very best. He talks to the lad, tells him how he has suffered from this early lack of opportunity, tries to make him realize that he is making great sacrifices to give the boy his chance, and urges him to seize his opportunity. The lad listens and assents. He is not a bad lad; but he cannot understand what his father is making such a fuss about, and he fritters away the shining hours, only to repent it bitterly in later years. It is so that men buy their experience.

An old Puritan divine wrote in his diary, 'Would God I could put my old head on the young shoulders of my son! But no: that cannot be. Like his father, he must learn wisdom out of his own bitter experiences.' If only the Father, in the Parable of the Prodigal, could have given his vagabond lad his own experience! But he could not. He could only stand aside and pray while the lad made the experiment for himself and learned its bitter lessons.

'But,' you say, 'is it not possible that experience will leave me a sadder, even though a wiser man? You tell me that I must learn the lessons of the experience of men in all ages and of the discipline of my own life; but what if I find that everything

is full of unutterable weariness and disappointment? what if the experiment yields for me the result "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity"? You tell me that experience proves that "the wages of sin is death." I admit it; but how does that help me, if, while I have struggled with sin, I can find no way of deliverance? What is the use of appealing to experience, if experience drives me to despair?' The answer is that there is an experience which drives away all doubt and despair—the triumphant experience, the experience that works hope, and a hope that has no disappointment in it.

Before you say that the facts of experience drive you to despair, ask yourself whether the range of your experience is as wide as it might be. Perhaps there are some experiments which you have not made, which if you made would revolutionize your whole outlook on life and fill you with an unconquerable hope. Make the greatest experiment of all. Make trial of Jesus Christ, and test the world and yourself and sin and sorrow and life and death in the light which He casts upon them. Many have made this experiment during the last nineteen centuries. Don't dismiss them lightly. Face the facts of life. Multitudes have found that Jesus Christ has cast a new light upon the way of life, by the aid of which they have discovered a new meaning in life's discipline and experiences. He has delivered them from the bondage of sin, and has given them life and abundance of it. He has enabled them to trample their sins and temptations beneath their feet. He

has illumined for them the valley of sorrow, and has taught them to use their sufferings and disappointments as instruments of their purification. He has filled their life with a new purpose that transfigures them, and has given them the unconquerable hope of immortality. I am not speaking of theories, but of facts. Why should you give way to discouragement? Why should you despair of the future of humanity when the experience of Christian men and women through nineteen centuries worketh hope—hope that is never disappointed?

I appeal to you: make this experiment for yourself. As some one has said, 'Do not think, try.' That does not mean you are never to think—but that thought must lead to action and experiment.

O make but trial of His love,
Experience will decide
How blest are they, and only they,
Who in His truth confide.

CHAPTER V.

THE DISCIPLINE OF SUFFERING

THE discipline in the School of Life is severe. One of its most common forms is that of suffering. This is a problem which has exercised men's minds from the days of Job, and earlier, but no easy solution has been found. A connexion has often been traced between suffering and sin, and there can be no doubt that such a relation exists. Some of our individual sufferings are due to our individual sins; and if we look at the world as a unity, we cannot doubt that much of its suffering is due to 'the sin of the world.' But that is only a partial explanation. What connexion can we trace between the Japanese earthquake and human sin? It may be said that the calamity was a judgement on the wickedness of Japan; but was Japan more wicked than other countries which might be named? Or to take another illustration, when we stand by the bedside of a good man who is racked with the pain of some mysterious disease, we find it difficult to believe that the whole explanation is the sin of the world. It is certainly true that if we could

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eliminate sin from the world, we should banish a great deal of suffering. But, when we have said that, we have not said all. There would still remain a residuum of suffering which would be unexplained.

When we turn to the New Testament, we do not find a complete solution, but we see shining gleams of light.

(1) The New Testament teaches that, whatever be the explanation of suffering, we can use the experience for the purifying of our characters and the redemption of the race.

(2) The New Testament reminds us that, although God's will is the controlling will in the universe, it is not the only will that is operative. In a world based on moral freedom there is room for the agency of evil spirits, and for the operations of the wicked wills of men.

(3) Underlying the thought of the New Testament writers is the idea that there is a subtle harmony between Nature and Man—that there is some twist in Nature corresponding to the crook in human nature. It is as though some blight has fallen on Nature, which causes forces which God intended to act beneficently to operate cruelly. Paul tells us that 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,' and that 'the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God.' I sometimes think that we shall never get near to the solution of the problem if our horizon is bounded by this planet on which we live. It seems to me that the

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sin and suffering of the world bring us face to face not merely with a world calamity, but with a cosmic catastrophe—a catastrophe involving the whole universe. It seems as though our suffering is, in part, the fruit of evil in other worlds than this, and that this earth is only a small part of the cosmic battlefield in which a titanic struggle between good and evil is going on. It is certain that Paul conceived of the work of Christ as having reference to other worlds than this. Ibsen expresses the same thought in a slightly different way, when he makes the Emperor Julian say of Jesus the Galilean, ‘What if Mount Golgotha, near Jerusalem, was but a wayside matter, a thing done as it were in passing, in a leisure hour? What if He goes on and on, and suffers and dies and conquers again and again, from world to world?’

The New Testament teaches that, whatever the explanation may be, the universe can only be redeemed by suffering. Innocent and guilty alike must suffer, and through their suffering they can annul the effects of the cosmic tragedy. If it be objected that the conditions of victory are hard and unjust, the answer is that God, too, has subjected Himself to them. He is afflicted in all our afflictions. God in Christ endured the Cross, out of His yearning for the redemption of the world.

Paul yearned for fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. It was not that he glorified suffering as an end in itself. It was not that he regarded Christianity as a religion of sorrow. But as he

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comprehends that Christ's sufferings were endured for the redemption of the creation, he longs to share His travail, and to be a co-worker and co-sufferer with Him in bringing many sons unto glory.

If we view suffering in the light of the gospel of Christ, we can so transmute it, that it shall become part of the groaning and travailing of the creation as it waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

1. *All our sufferings may be taken up into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.* This is a stupendous statement to make. I do not think that I can prove it, and yet I think that it is true. I remember hearing of a minister who lay on his bed, year after year, twisted with pain. He said that the ordinary, commonplace consolations of religion did not seem quite so easy to believe as when he preached them in the days of his health and strength. But he baptised his suffering into Jesus Christ, and was not only able to bear it, but emerged from the crucible refined. He could not see the connexion, neither can we. But if this pain was one of the effects of the great cosmic struggle between good and evil, and was part of the price that was being paid for victory, and if he bore it as such, and used it for his own purification, and for a triumphant witness to others of the sufficiency of the grace of Christ, even in pain and anguish, then he had fellowship in the sufferings of Christ.

What a name Mrs. Hamilton King gives to this

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earth of ours in *The Disciples!*—‘The Star of Suffering.’ Our sufferings are transmuted and transfigured, if we take them up into the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings, and if we view them as part of the price of victory in the great struggle between good and evil. We can even rejoice in our sufferings if every sigh and sob and tear brings us into fellowship with Christ and aids His universal victory.

2. *Perfection of personality can only be attained through fellowship in the suffering of Christ.* It cannot be denied that suffering is a discipline that makes for the beautifying of character. It was written of Jesus that He learned obedience and was made perfect through suffering. And if suffering was necessary for Him, how much more for us! The effect of suffering upon us depends on what we are. It may either harden and embitter and sour us, or it may purify and refine and beautify us. Everything depends on whether we bring our suffering into fellowship with the suffering of Christ, and use it for the ends for which He lived and died.

The late Dr. James Moulton used to tell of a nursery gardener of his acquaintance who developed in his glasshouse a wonderful new variety of flower. Its colour was scarlet. The gardener was anxious to produce a white bloom of the same variety. He made many experiments in this direction; all in vain. But one night there came a terrific storm. In the morning the gardener went to see what had happened to his precious

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flower. He found the glasshouse smashed to bits, but there was the flower unharmed,—no longer scarlet, but white. The storm had achieved what everything else had failed to do. The scarlet had become pure white. The story is a parable which hardly needs application. The storm has its place in the discipline of life, and many a man has found that through suffering his sins which were as scarlet have become white as snow.

In the *Sky Pilot*, Ralph Connor has a parable of the Canyon—the deep gully in the prairie. ‘Gwen’ had been rendered helpless by an accident, and she raged and rebelled in her suffering and pain. And the Sky Pilot came to her and told her the parable of the Canyon.

‘At first there was no canyon, but only the broad, open prairie. One day the Master of the Prairie asked the Prairie, “Where are your flowers?” And the Prairie said, “Master, I have no seeds.” And the Master spoke to the birds, and they scattered seeds over the prairie, and soon it blossomed with crocuses and roses and buffalo beans, and the yellow crowfoot, and the wild sunflowers and the red lilies all the summer long. And the Master came again and was well pleased, but He missed the flowers that He loved best of all. And He said to the Prairie, “Where are the clematis and the columbine, and the sweet violets and wind flowers, and all the ferns and flowering shrubs?” And the Prairie answered sorrowfully, “Oh, Master, I cannot keep the flowers, for the wind sweeps fiercely and the sun

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beats upon my breast, and they wither up and fly away." Then the Master spoke to the lightning, and with one swift blow the lightning cleft the Prairie to the heart. And the Prairie rocked and groaned, and for many a day moaned bitterly over its black, jagged, gaping wound. But the little river poured its waters through the cleft and carried down deep, black mould, and once more the birds carried seeds and strewed them in the canyon. And after a long time the rough rocks were decked out with soft mosses and trailing vines, and all the nooks were hung with clematis and columbine, and great elms lifted their huge tops into the sunlight, and down about their feet clustered the low cedars and balsams, and everywhere the violets and wind-flower and maidenhair grew and bloomed till the canyon became the Master's place of rest and peace and joy.

'After a silence Gwen said gently, "Yes, the canyon flowers are much the best." Then the Pilot read to her, "The flowers of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control." "Which are the canyon flowers?" asked Gwen, and the Pilot answered, "Gentleness, meekness, self-control; but though the others bloom in the open, yet never with so rich a bloom and so sweet a perfume as in the canyon." And Gwen said wistfully, "There are no flowers in my canyon, but only rugged rocks." But the day came when one said of her, "Of all flowers I have seen, none are fairer or

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sweeter than those that are waving in Gwen's canyon." 2

If we cannot fully solve the problem of suffering we can, at any rate, use the discipline of suffering for the perfecting of our characters. Are there flowers in our canyon or only rugged rocks? Perhaps you have not come to your canyon yet. When you come to it, will you grow flowers there? It all depends on yourself. Have fellowship in the sufferings of Christ, make your sufferings one with His, become a sharer in His travail for the redemption of the world, and you will bring forth the flowers of the canyon. All experience proves that the flowers of the canyon are best. We, like our Master, are made perfect through suffering. If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him.

CHAPTER VI

THE DISCIPLINE OF CHANGE

THERE seems to be in most men an ingrained fear of change. We cling to the old paths that we know, and are distrustful of great changes. Revolutionary changes have followed in the wake of the Great War, and their end is not yet, and many are afraid.

But change is one of the most valuable disciplines in the School of Life. One of the Psalmists said a very penetrating thing when he wrote, 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.' Change is a mark of life. The true emblem of life is not a straight and hard road, but a flowing stream. The law of life is not unchangeability, but change; not rigidity, but growth.

Unchangeableness is the proper attribute of God alone. He only is unchanging from eternity to eternity. But He reveals Himself through the changing.

We live in a world of change, and have our being in a succession of fleeting moments. One of the secrets of life is to grasp the meaning of change and to learn the lessons of the passing moments as well as of the eternal.

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We meet a friend after the lapse of many years, and we say to him, 'You have not changed at all.' But if we are referring to anything more than his physical appearance, we are paying him no compliment. The years ought to have brought many changes. What we ought to be able to discern is not sameness, but identity in the midst of differences. The stream is the same, but the water ought to be wider and deeper, and it ought to be surrounded by a more beautiful landscape.

'Times have changed, and we with them are changed,' lamented an old Roman poet. But if the change is of the right kind, that is no cause for lamentation. If we have to say, 'Times have not changed, neither have we,' we bring an indictment against ourselves. We leave ourselves open to the inference 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.'

How, then, are we to bring change into the service of life?

We must find a meaning in the passing experiences of life. We all of us have a tendency to strive after fixity and finality in religious life and belief. When a great experience comes to us, we are apt to say, 'Let us build a tabernacle and abide here for ever.' But the demand which God makes on us is not that we build a house in the safe shelter of a rock, where we may tarry for the remainder of our days, but that we launch our boat upon the river, and sail away to open seas. The soul does not grow by feeding on the same landscape, but by observing the changing

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panorama of life and by learning the lessons of ever new experiences.

The religious life of many of us consists of the memory of a great experience, of a few fixed and final beliefs, and of a few working maxims of conduct. We never dream of change in our religious life. Passing experiences may test our faith, but we rarely look to them to teach us anything new, or to give us fresh revelations of God. It is, indeed, well that we should cherish the memory of the great experiences of the past, and cling to the beliefs which we have found to be an anchor to the soul. But why tarry in that country, beautiful as it is, when the river of life and the winds of heaven will carry and waft our barque into more fertile lands, full of beauties which it has not entered into the mind of man to conceive? Heaven is knocking at our doors in all the passing experiences of life, and many of us are slow to let it in, because we distrust change.

The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

God is in everything; not only in the great experiences of life but in its small experiences, not only in the big moments which are pregnant with mighty issues, but in the little moments that come and go and seem to leave no trace behind them. Someone has said, 'God abides: He has an infinite variety of things to say to us; the connectedness of those things lies in His infinite wisdom; our wisdom is to listen to them one after another, and

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carry them out with loyal obedience. The man who really trusts God waits upon Him for His orders day by day. And in this simplicity of obedience he finds the acme of happiness and peace.'

When we have thus learned to look for God in the transient as well as in the eternal, we shall find Him in our own inner experience. We shall depend for guidance not so much upon external rules and maxims as upon the changing revelations which God gives us in the inner places of the spirit. We shall also look for God and listen for His messages in the outer experiences of life. Why is it that many find the world so dreary a place? It is because they cannot find God in the world. They believe that He created it and has intervened in its processes now and again, but they cannot find Him in it. Why is it that we find the burdens and vicissitudes of life so hard to bear? It is because we see in them no revelation of God. What a difference it would make to our outlook and to our peace if we could find God even in the darker experiences of life! Not that God has willed all the calamities which come upon the children of men. But there is not one of them which He allows to pass beyond His control, and which He does not enable man to subordinate to the higher ends of the soul. The flood and the storm take on a new aspect when we know that God sits upon the flood and rides upon the storm.

During the war many were tempted to believe that the divine government of the world was

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abrogated and that the forces of evil were allowed to work their will. They would not let go their faith in God, because they believed that in His own good time He would take hold of the reins again. But if God lets go of the reins, even for an hour, we can trust Him no longer. We held fast our faith in God, because we found Him even in the transient but awful experiences of war. He showed us how to snatch good out of evil. He revealed us to ourselves in our greatness and in our baseness. He stripped bare evil and exposed its horrid ugliness. Above all He revealed His own forbearance and mercy and judgement. The unchanging God is to be found and known in and through the changing experiences of life.

Carpe diem—seize the day—has been the motto of the devotees of pleasure. They have said, There is no outlook beyond the grave; let us seize every moment and squeeze all the pleasure possible out of it. It is a false theory of life, but the motto 'seize the moment' is right. Cannot we make it our own, reading into it a higher and nobler meaning? Let us seize each moment, grasp its meaning, and learn its lessons for the service of God and man and for the strengthening of our own souls.

Eternity is a conception which lies beyond our comprehension. But what is a moment? It is a fleeting manifestation of eternity, and we can grasp it. It is this faculty of seizing the passing moment which marks off the great saints from their fellows. They have taken each moment as it has come,

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have responded to its call, and have done everything whether 'sacred' or 'secular' in the name and to the glory of the Lord Jesus. We are all devoted to the service of God, in a general sense. But the saint is devoted to the particular duty of each particular moment, trivial and unimportant though it may seem. Someone has said that the saints are the people who do ordinary things extraordinarily well. Change is for them a revelation of the many-sided duties to which God calls His children. The transient is not unimportant, but is the material out of which eternity is fashioned. Therefore they seize the passing moment.

Walter Pater said, 'To form habits is failure.' This seems a hard saying. Is not the formation of good habits one of the surest ways of building up character? Is it not one of the main purposes of education in school and home to teach children to cultivate good habits? We feel that the victory is won when we have got past the strife and conflict, and a particular virtue has become a habit. All this is true, but we are bound to recognize that even good habits may become tyrants. There is something lacking in the man whose habits are so fixed that he is unable to adapt himself to a new situation or to respond to the stimulus of new ideas. Our habits should be an elastic band rather than an iron chain. To strength they should add flexibility and power of adaptation. Lack of flexibility in our habits stands in the way of the growth of our souls. Because we lack the enter-

prising spirit which welcomes soul-renewing change, our spiritual life sinks into a rut. We go on repeating the same prayers year after year, long after they have ceased to correspond to the deepest yearnings of our hearts. We go on clinging to the forms of belief and the standards of conduct which we embraced many years ago, and we steadfastly refuse to face the questions anew in the light of new knowledge and of an enlarged personal experience. We live on old stores when God is daily offering us new resources, better adapted to our present needs. We live on phrases instead of on the revelations which are new every morning. We seek to warm our souls at dead cinders instead of at the Divine Fire, which is ever ready to descend from heaven.

Change is the law of life; it is not the foe of the soul, but its ally. Through the passing we rise to the permanent, through the transient we reach the abiding. If our inner life is not moving and changing, there is something wrong in our relation to God. Change is the ladder by which we reach the unchanging.

What is the goal to which we move through this life of continual change? The answer is—‘changed into His image from glory to glory.’

CHAPTER VII

THE FLIGHT FROM FEAR AND FATE

THE following story appeared in the Life of a Scottish minister. The minister said to a friend: 'I am going to preach on Prayer next Sunday. I have not yet made the sermon, but I have two ideas:

'1. *Prayer is flight from fear*—from fear of the universe. I met an old woman in the country. "It's a fine day," I said to her. "Aye," was the reply, "but we'll have rain afore nicht if they can manage it at a'." She regarded the unseen forces as hostile.

'2. *Prayer is an appeal from Fate.*'

No notes of the sermon were found in the minister's papers, so that it is not known how he developed his theme. But his two ideas are worth considering. If I had to preach a sermon on them, I should take as my text, 'I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears' (Ps. xxxiv. 4). One of the great lessons that the Master teaches to those who are willing to learn of Him in the School of Life is that 'men ought always to pray.'

Prayer is a Flight from Fear.

Your experience has been a singular one if you have not, at some time or another, felt yourself in the grip of a vague, undefined, and unreasoning fear. Travellers have told us that sometimes, when they have been alone among the high mountains, a sudden fear has come upon them. It has not been physical fear, for they were ready to face any visible perils. But suddenly they were overawed by a sense of the grandeur and majesty of their surroundings, a consciousness of their own utter insignificance came home to them, and they were afraid. It is some such mood that one of the psalmists describes when he tells us that, amid the stillness and silence of a starlit night he contemplated the splendour and glory of the shining heavens, and cried, 'What is man that Thou art mindful of him?' But he found deliverance from his fears by turning away from the outward universe to that inward universe, 'of which our God Himself is moon and sun.' In other words, he sought the Lord, and He answered him, and delivered him from all his fears. Is there any one who does not know something of the fear of the universe? I saw somewhere the other day a cartoon which represented a little child standing alone on the edge of a promontory in the middle of the night, and gazing up perplexedly at the moon and the stars. Underneath were the words 'Quo Vadis?' *Whither goest thou?* The parable needs no exposition. It reflects a mood that takes hold of us all at some time or another. What are we?

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Mere atoms in an infinite universe? Infants crying in the night? Phantoms that appear on the stage for a period and then disappear? Whence do we come? Whither do we go? As we think of these things we are afraid.

Don't you sometimes think with a cold shudder—What after all if there is no God? What if the world is a rudderless ship? What if the Power that we worship should prove to be nothing else than remorseless force? As we look at our lives, and see how they are shaped and fashioned for us by circumstances over which we have no control, we are tempted to think that we are in the grip of relentless powers which laugh at our vain struggles and hurry us on to some goal not of our own choosing. And if there be a God, what if he be a god who, having created the universe, has stepped on one side and now views it only as a more or less interested spectator? What if he is, as someone has said, 'heedless of those who have been marred by the machinery that he has set in motion?'

And there is another fear that sometimes lurks in the background of our minds. It is that 'the spirits that rule the universe, if there are such spirits, are malicious beings who delight to hurt us.' Don't be in a hurry to deny this fear. The story of the old woman which I quoted just now is a case in point. We may smile at it—but many of us say and do things that are very much on the same plane. There are few of us whose minds are entirely rid of the idea of

unseen powers that are hostile to us and are seeking to do us harm. No man's religious system is entirely logical and self-consistent. Bound up with the beliefs of most of us are survivals from earlier ages, which perhaps our reason condemns, but which none the less we have not surrendered. We speak of these elements in our belief as superstitions. You all know the kind of thing to which I am referring. This day is unlucky, that number is unlucky, that month is unlucky. This or that action or collocation of circumstances is unlucky, a garment of a particular colour is unlucky. If we are challenged, we laugh at these superstitions and deny that they form any part of our belief. But all the same a great many think it best to be on the safe side and take no risks, and we sedulously avoid the things that superstition accounts to be dangerous. That is only a form of the fear of the universe—the fear of hostile unseen powers.

Then, again, there is the fear of the future. There is many a man whose heart sinks within him as he thinks of the future. It may be that he has cause for anxiety, or it may be that he has none. I heard of a millionaire who was haunted by the fear that he would die in the workhouse—and that fear killed him at a comparatively early age. I have known people who have made what might have been a happy life miserable by the anticipation of troubles that never came. These men belong to the class described by one of the psalmists when he says, 'There were they in great fear, where no fear was.' Let

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it be admitted at once that, while such fear is often unreasonable, it is also often apparently reasonable. That is, there seem to be good grounds for it. The shadow of poverty or ill-health or moral disaster to a loved one may haunt a home and rob it of its joy. But even so, Jesus says, 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' Life is full of the unexpected. The things you fear, the things that seem to be certainly coming, may never come to pass. Time enough to shoulder your burden when it is laid upon you. Some of the heaviest loads we carry are the fears we create out of our imaginations.

Well, where shall we find a refuge from these fears of the universe? It is of little use to argue with them. It rarely happens that you can drive out fear by argument. If you think you can, try it with a little child. The only way to exorcise fear of something is to create confidence in something or someone else. This is the truth which the psalmist has grasped. He has been oppressed by fears. How has he found deliverance from them? Listen to his answer: 'I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.' There is no argument there, but there is very valuable and instructive experience. The only antidote to fear is confidence and trust in God, and I cannot attain to that unless I live with Him in the fellowship of prayer.

The universe dwarfs me, and I feel my utter insignificance and am filled with fear. But when I enter the secret place and hold fellowship with

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God, I know that I am of more value in His sight than the most radiant star, and I can challenge the universe.

I feel that I am like that little child, perplexed by the mystery of existence; but when I lift up my heart to God in prayer, I know that I come from God and return to God, and I am no longer afraid. I wonder whether there is a God, and whether the world and myself are at the mercy of blind and relentless forces; but when I utter my cry of supplication God answers me, and I know that there is a God.

I ask myself whether God stands outside the machine which He has created, and whether He is heedless of the sobs of those who are wounded and bruised. But when I pray to Him, I find Him at my side as my Helper and Comforter, and I know that He has a heart of compassion and love.

I find lurking in the back of my mind a fear of hostile, unseen forces; but when I pray there comes such a sense of security as puts these senseless fears to flight. I sometimes fear the unknown future; but when I pray, I seem to understand that God holds the key of all unknown, and I am glad. Prayer is a flight and a refuge from fear.

Prayer is an Appeal from Fate.

A good deal of what I have already said might be placed under this heading. But I want to write a few words specifically on Fate. The belief in Fate is quite compatible with a kind of faith in God. The fatalist is the man who believes

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that we who live in this universe are shut up in a closed universe, and that we are subject to the operation of laws and forces, the action of which even God Himself cannot modify. The fatalist says that everything happens according as it is appointed. If the bullet hits the soldier, his number was on the bullet. If a man dies, even from living in insanitary conditions, his time has come. If a man fails in business—well, it had to be. The fatalist does not seem to realize that if physical evil is predestined, moral evil must be predestined too. Nothing we can do can alter the course of events. Prayer may be valuable because of its reflex influence on him who prays, but it cannot in any way affect the course of events.

The truth is that, when we allow ourselves to believe in Fate, we are dominated by a false conception of the universe. Two views of the universe are open to us. They have been well expressed by Sir Oliver Lodge: 'The one that of a self-contained and self-sufficient universe, with no outlook into or links with anything beyond, uninfluenced by any life or mind except such as is connected with a visible and material body; and the other conception, that of a universe lying open to all manner of spiritual influences, permeated through and through with a Divine spirit, guarded and watched by living minds, acting through the medium of a law indeed, but with intelligence and love behind the law; a universe by no means self-sufficient or self-contained, but with sensitive tendrils groping into another super-sensuous order

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of existence, where reign laws hitherto unimagined by science, but laws as real and as mighty as those by which the material universe is governed.'

Now, when a man prays he recognizes that the second of the two conceptions is the true one. He knows that he is not in the grip of a relentless machine which has passed beyond the control of its creator. He looks on himself as an actor in a great drama, the purpose of which is as yet not fully unfolded. The far-off goal to which the drama is moving is known to the Divine dramatist, and we have caught some blinding glimpses of it. But the movement of the drama from stage to stage is adapted to the conduct of the actors, some of whom play their part well and some ill. It is no written part, fixed and predestined, that we play. If I may so express it, the Divine Dramatist writes His drama as it moves from scene to scene. His love and intelligence are constantly active, and He calls on us to use ours and to co-operate with Him. He is continually gathering up broken threads, repairing failures, encouraging the discouraged, transforming bad actors into good actors, wresting good from evil, and through it all the drama steadily advances to its triumphant culmination. We realize we are not automata, we are agents. We have a living part even as God has, in the shaping and the progress of events, and in the vindication of the righteousness of God.

I say that these things come home to us when we pray. When we enter into communion with the Infinite, we laugh at Fate. The conviction

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of the saints in every age has been that they were the captains of their own souls, and that God is the Captain of their salvation. In prayer they have been lifted into a higher spiritual universe. They know that the world is governed not merely by material laws and forces, but by higher spiritual laws and forces, which at present lie beyond our ken, but which are the expression of the living will of Him in whom we live and move and have our being, and who upholds all things by the word of His power. God's will is not a will asserted millions of years ago, once for all. It is a will that still guides and controls, and those who pray according to the mind and spirit of Jesus know that their imperfect prayers represent a portion of the guiding and controlling will of God, and so have a real influence on the course of events, and contribute to the realization of the grand consummation. 'I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.' Prayer is a flight and a refuge from fate.

Why are we so fearful? Why are we so superstitious? Why do we so often yield to a fatalism that fills us with paralysis and despair? 'Men ought always to pray and not to faint.' Let us learn of the ancient seers and saints, and above all of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the school of prayer. Let us walk and talk with God in the garden in the cool of the day. Let our fellowship be with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, and then by God's grace we shall cast all our fears and terrors to the winds, and

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we shall laugh at fate, because 'neither principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

CHAPTER VIII

MORAL PERPLEXITIES

IT is said that Goethe's dying cry was 'more light.' That has always been man's cry. We ask for light upon the riddles of existence. We seek to know the principles on which the universe is governed. We ask, 'Is there One above and behind all things, who holds the reins in His hands?' We continually ask questions as to the purpose of sorrow and suffering, and why sin has been permitted to enter the world. We crave for guidance, as we are confronted with the choice of the many paths that life opens out before us. How shall we distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, and between the good and the best? We need light that we may see our way.

The Fourth Evangelist tells us that no man has ever been left wholly in the darkness. There is 'the light which lighteth every man coming into the world.' On every man's horizon there is a gleam of light, which beckons him on into the regions of wider light. Christ was in the world

before He was born in Bethlehem. It was He who shone in the hearts of the Hebrew prophets and great pagan teachers. From the very beginning He was on His way toward the Incarnation, until at length He was made flesh, and His disciples beheld His glory, glory as of the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. And He still shines in the hearts even of those who have never heard or responded to the gospel. It is still true that here is a light which lighteth every man coming into the world. And when we replenish our flickering torches, by taking them to Jesus Christ, it is then that the way of truth and righteousness stretches clearly before us. We who live in Christian lands can hardly distinguish between the light within and the light without. The rays which shine in our hearts are interlaced and intermingled with those that stream from Bethlehem and Olivet and Calvary. Christian ideas have so permeated the atmosphere of the Western world, and are so much part of our inheritance and training, that it is difficult to tell how much we owe to the 'inward light,' and how much to Jesus of Nazareth. But the point to be emphasized is that no man need ever walk in darkness. There is always a gleam of light, if we will but see and follow it. If we do not see it the fault is ours. There is a light which lighteth every man coming into the world.

There is much in the history of our race that might well lead us to despair of human nature. Cynics and pessimists can make out a very good

superficial case for their position. It is estimated that there have been human beings on this planet for perhaps a million years. Great progress has undoubtedly been made, especially by some races, but we have discovered that the reversion to barbarism is surprisingly easy. History tells of great civilizations that have come and gone one after the other. It seems sometimes that our race can climb the mountain side up to a certain point, and then it falls back into the valley from utter weariness. We all know that the dominant mood of to-day is one of despair of progress. If new methods of action and social organization are suggested we are told that they are contrary to human nature, and the assumption is that human nature cannot be changed. So the weary cycle of progress and retrogression is apparently to go on for ever.

What is the answer to this pessimistic view of the world and of human nature? It is that there is a light which lighteth every man coming into the world. There is a golden gleam resting on our humanity. As far back as history can take us there are indications that the light shone in the darkness, and we know that the darkness has not overpowered it. The light that never was on land or sea has shone on our humanity, and though it has been obscured by clouds and shadows and darkness and thick darkness, it has never been quenched. And that light has widened. It may have been but slowly, and man's pursuit of the light may have been hesitating and

reluctant, but there has never been an age in which some men have not seen the gleam beckoning them onward and upward. The earliest records of our race tell of some great pioneer souls who towered above their fellows, and who saw shining on the horizon the vision of a far-off city. In their own day and generation they witnessed to the glorious possibilities that are latent in human nature. They were burning and shining lights, and men were willing for a season to abide in their light. The glorious succession has never died out of men and women who have pointed their fellows to the gleam, and the great fact stands that humanity has progressed when it has followed the gleam, and that it has lost ground when it has seen no light but that of sun and moon and stars.

During recent years much time and thought have been devoted to the study of religion in ancient as well as in modern times, and among backward as well as among civilized races. It used to be said that there were some races among which no trace of a religion could be discovered. Now that fallacy has been exploded. Many religions seem to us to be but a crude mass of superstitions. But superstition is only a perverted form of the religious instinct. There is no race of man that does not show some sense of a power beyond and above themselves, some realization of unseen forces, and some desire to come into a right relation with them. What does it mean? It means that there is a light in their hearts that has been kindled at no earthly fire. The lamp may burn low, and

there may be more smoke than flame, but the light has never gone out. Ruined temples, crumbling altars, magic talismans, innumerable customs whose meaning is forgotten, all alike witness to the universal yearning of the human heart after the divine, to the cry for more light and fuller.

The light sometimes burned very brightly even in ages that were dark. Very early records tell of men who walked with God and who spoke to Him face to face. They were few and far between, but they shone as beacon lights and they kept alive in the hearts of men the undying fires of God.

Then let me remind you of the witness of conscience. Man's knowledge of the distinctions between right and wrong has often been very crude and elementary, men have often differed, and they still dispute as to what is right and what is wrong. But that there is a difference between right and wrong, man has never doubted so far back as we have any knowledge of him. He has been urged on by an inward 'I ought,' which he has not always been able to explain even to himself. A strange sense of shame has possessed him when he has been discovered in the doing of what seemed to him to be wrong; and even when he has not been discovered, he has been weighed down by the dreary and miserable consciousness that the avenging furies are on his track, and will some day exact the uttermost farthing. More than that, apart altogether from Christianity, there are stories

of men who have faced discomfort and loss and pain and sacrifice and even death because they felt they dare not disobey the inward 'I ought.' Read the story of Socrates, and listen to him as he tells us how his words and actions were guided and controlled by an inward voice, and you begin to realize how the light has shone even in pagan hearts. And you will remember that Socrates died rather than quench the light by disobeying the voice. But Socrates was an exception, you say. Not by any means. For every case that is recorded in the scanty records of the past, it is safe to say that there were many humble and unknown men who were conscious of the same inward voice, and who followed the same inward light.

Man has always been a dreamer. The world as it is has never satisfied him, he has always dreamed of a nobler and a better world. And even that vision has never satisfied him. He has seen beyond it an unseen world where all the longings of his soul shall be satisfied. Not only religion and morality, but art, and poetry, and music witness to the fact that God has set eternity in man's heart, and that he is restlessly and ceaselessly striving after it. Despite all the defeats and vicissitudes and disappointments and disillusionments of history, man is still conscious of the 'urge' of the eternal within him. He still sees his visions and dreams his dreams. He still sees the golden gleam on the far horizon, and however you reason with him, he still turns longing eyes

to it, and in his better moments rises and follows it.

There is a story of a man who was once invited to a banquet of the gods. He was told that among them there was one who was a man like himself. Outwardly he was indistinguishable from the rest. He was clothed as they were. But the man recognized his fellow mortal by the restlessness in his eyes. That is the glory of our human nature. It is restless until it finds rest in God. It can never acquiesce in the world as it is, or in human nature as it is. It must follow the gleam beyond the horizon and discover what lies beyond. There is a light which lighteth every man coming into the world.

Can we trust the gleam? Any one who has read history knows that it has led man along many and varied paths, and has produced a great diversity of religious and of moral standards. I have no space to enter into the whole question. I will only remind you that many paths that seem to us to lead in opposite directions converge on the far horizon and reach one of the twelve gates into the invisible City.

My concern is with the intellectual and religious and moral problems that beset those of us who live in Christian lands. I have already said that for us the light within and the light that streams from the Jesus of history blend. We have all the guidance we need for the way of life. There will always be questions which we cannot answer and mysteries which we cannot solve, but we shall always have enough light by which to walk.

But is that so? Is the guidance which is given us so clear after all? If it is, why is it that Christian men differ from one another in intellectual beliefs, and even in their conceptions of right and wrong? How is it that you will find Christian men holding sincerely and even passionately convictions that seem to be and often are in direct antagonism to one another?

(a) *The answer is in the first place that Christian men may make mistakes.* To be a Christian is not to be endowed with either intellectual or moral infallibility. We suffer from all manner of defects, intellectual, temperamental, and moral. We inherit all manner of prejudices and prepossessions of which it is difficult to rid ourselves. It is very hard to purge the heart of pride and selfishness, and our vision is often obscured by these things. Many a Christian man thinks himself sincere, and animated by motives that are absolutely pure. But such is the subtlety of our human nature that there may lurk some hidden vestiges of selfishness or self-will, and these inevitably warp his vision. Many a Christian man has pursued a will o' the wisp, thinking he is following the gleam. Our vision of God is in proportion to the purity of our hearts. And it is only as we cleanse our hearts of ignorance and pride and selfishness, that we shall learn to distinguish between the authentic light of God and those wandering fires which lead us into swamps and mire.

(b) In the second place some views of truth and right which seem to us to be antagonistic, in

reality complete each other. What I mean is that many of our oppositions are due to a one-sided emphasis of truths that are necessary to one another.

The white light of the sun splits up into rays of seven different colours—violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red. It is so with the white light of truth. It splits up into many rays. Paul says that the wisdom of God is many-coloured. One man cries the light is red. Another it is green, &c. Do they contradict each other? No, the answer is that they are all right and all wrong. Each man sees and knows but in part. Instead of refuting each other, they complete each other. Catholicism and Protestantism seem to be directly antagonistic, but if you strip them of the errors that have crept into them, they are found to emphasize or over-emphasize principles that are necessary to each other. Catholicism stands for order; Protestantism for freedom. Catholicism emphasizes the social aspects of religion; Protestantism the individual aspects of religion. Each represents different aspects of the truth. Each completes the other. Order without freedom is tyranny, but freedom without order is license. The individual's freedom of access to God is vital to the Christian life; but so also are the witness and ministrations of the fellowship of disciples which we call the Church. If men differ from you in belief, don't be in too great a hurry to accuse them of error. It may be that you are following rays of one colour and they are following rays of another colour, but the rays they

see and those which you see combine to make the light which streams from the Sun of Righteousness.

But perhaps you say that you are not so much concerned with matters of belief as with the practical issues of right and wrong. How is it that some good men think certain courses of action right, which other equally good men hold to be wrong? There are of course certain clearly-marked distinctions of right and wrong which every one recognizes. The trouble often arises over those matters which belong to the neutral zone of morality—the things which may possibly be lawful, but which may or may not be expedient. How are we to know which path we ought to tread? My answer is ‘Follow the gleam.’ However many diverging paths stretch out before you, you will always find that there is one path which is distinguished from the others by a gleam of light which beckons you on. You may not see the gleam at first. You must pray and seek for purity of motive. You must ponder the teaching of Jesus. You must take counsel with those who have a deeper understanding than you have of Christian truth. Then you will not fail to see the gleam, and seeing it, you must follow it. Follow the light you see. You had better make a mistake sincerely than do the right thing in violation of your own conscience. More important than our actions is a good will. And if we have a will that is animated by motives that are as pure as we can make them, then, though we may

err in this or that, we shall find the shining paths of light.

More perplexing than the conflict between good and evil is often the conflict between two goods. Take the case of Abraham. It seemed to be his duty to offer up his only son Isaac. Two sacred sentiments came into conflict with one another—his love to God and his love to his son. According to the religious conception of his age, God was well-pleased with the sacrifice of the first-born. His love for God triumphed over his love for his son. In so acting Abraham was acting according to the highest light he had seen, and so was following the gleam. And it is worth noting that in the process of following the light he saw, there came to him a larger revelation. The truth came home to him that God does not require human sacrifice, and he advanced to a nobler conception of religion.

The question is often asked why God does not make everything so clear that there is never any doubt as to which course is right and which is wrong, or which is good and which is best. And the answer is that life is a school. We are here to learn, to grow. God desires not merely children who do His will, but children who do His will because they understand it and love it. We must learn to distinguish between the divine gleam and the will o' the wisp. We must learn for ourselves the difference between good and evil, and follow the good not merely because God commands it, but because we have learned to love it. God will

not absolve us from the discipline of thought and questioning and striving, because that is the way to learn and to grow. He gives us enough light by which to walk, and if we follow it, we shall find that the light shines more and more unto the perfect day.

The great rule of the Christian life is, follow the gleam. Paul tells us that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. The gleam flashed before his eyes on the Damascus Road, and he followed it till death. That is the secret of victory and progress. Men cry out for more light, while they do not live up to the light they already have. The way to a larger and wider light is to live up to the light we see. 'He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'

Are you living up to the light that you see? Never have men's minds and hearts and consciences been so illuminated. Never has the light of Christ shone more brightly in the world. We see and know the truth, but the tragedy of the present hour is that men will not follow it. Let us be true to the light we see. There is the gleam on the horizon, beckoning us on to lives of faith and purity and heroism and great adventure.

There on the border
Of boundless ocean,
And all but in heaven,
Hovers the gleam.
Not of the sunlight!
Not of the moonlight!
Not of the starlight!

O young mariner,
Down to the haven
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,
And crowd your canvas;
And ere it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow the gleam.

CHAPTER IX

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

CHRISTIAN men are agreed that the rule to which they must conform their conduct is the moral teaching of the Master of Life. 'If ye love Me,' He said, 'keep My commandments.' But this is not as simple as it sounds, for the question at once arises, How are we to interpret the commandments? In the time of our Lord, the religion of the great majority of the Jews consisted largely of keeping commandments. This was the reason why the most spiritual men among them were beginning to realize the inadequacy of their religion. Upon the basis of commandments there had been built up an elaborate and complicated system of casuistry. Men had to move carefully, for there was a commandment covering almost every possible situation of life. The multitude of commandments had become burdensome. It was impossible to breathe freely. The individual conscience, it is hardly too much to say, was bound and gagged and cast into prison. Moreover, moral values were to a large extent lost sight of in this servile obedience to the externals of the Law.

Did Jesus simply give the world a new and

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higher legalism than Judaism? Is the only difference between Christianity and Judaism that between higher and lower commandments? Are we entitled to call the mount on which the great sermon was preached 'The New Sinai,' as some have done? Then all that Jesus did was to substitute one burden for another—a heavier for a lighter one. But that is not what the New Testament writers teach us. The New Testament resounds with shouts of liberty. The writers rejoice not merely in emancipation from sin, but in liberation from the tyranny of the law of commandments contained in ordinances. They were free from the legal fetters that had enslaved them. They had grasped the truth proclaimed by the Master—'The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life.' What is the significance of the terms 'spirit' and 'life' in this connexion? He means that His words are not hard-and-fast enactments, but spiritual principles which are capable of the expression and adaptation that are inseparable from life.

Jesus Christ was not a Legislator, but a Prophet. This is not to say that He was merely a Prophet, but simply that His moral teaching is to be regarded not as legislative but prophetic. Now, what is the difference between the legislator and the prophet? The legislator says, 'Thou shalt do this and thou shalt not do that.' He promulgates rules and regulations. At every point he sets up notice-boards with the heading, 'It is forbidden.' He penetrates into every sphere of

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life and conduct, and seeks to establish the dominion of his rules. He is not concerned with the education of the conscience. It is his business to impose commands, and to exact obedience. If you take the moral legislator as your guide, you are saved from much perplexity. All you have to do is to consult the map of conduct which he has drawn up, and you will find guidance for any situation in which you may find yourself.

The prophet, on the other hand, does not legislate. He enunciates eternal principles, and according to the light given to him, seeks to teach men to apply them to the circumstances of their own time. His appeal is not to a fixed code of laws, but to the conscience. He seeks to help men to face moral problems for themselves, and to guide them to a right solution. And to this end he declares unchanging moral principles, which are never out of date, but which the conscience must learn to apply to new situations as they arise.

Christ says, 'My words are spirit and life.' He never legislated. He did not give men rules of conduct for the varying situations of life. He enumerated unalterable principles, breathed a spirit, and gave men an example that they should walk in His steps. He was a Prophet, not a legislator.

Let me take an illustration. Of recent years we have been much perplexed by social problems. We have turned to the New Testament for guidance. And the remarkable thing is this, that men of all schools, individualists, and socialists, and

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philosophic anarchists, have claimed Jesus Christ as being on their side. How is that possible? Because Jesus Christ did not legislate, but offered general principles, and any school of thought which has in it any element of truth can therefore find support in the teaching of Jesus. But why did not Jesus legislate? Would it not be a great help to us, if Jesus had indicated in detail the solution of the social problems of His own day? No, it would have been a hindrance. Social conditions and social problems change, and the Master knew that man's tendency to literalism and legalism is such that if He had laid down detailed rules for dealing with the social evils of His day men would have regarded them as being binding for all time, even under entirely different conditions. He therefore limited Himself to declaring those principles which are valid in all times and under all conditions, and thereby kept open the path of liberty.

We are sometimes told that we should regard the Sermon on the Mount as a code of legal enactments, and should be careful to interpret it with exact literalness. Tolstoi, you will remember, stood for the literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. For instance, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged,' means that the whole machinery of law and government must be done away with. Your judges, magistrates, and policemen must be disbanded. No man has a right to sit in judgment on another. It is felt by many that the literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount makes

more strenuous demands upon us than any other, and that if we interpret its precepts in a spiritual sense, we have emptied it of much of its moral content.

But I think it can easily be shown in the first place that if we press the literal meaning of particular precepts too far, we may easily nullify the whole spirit of the Master's teaching. Let me take by way of illustration a precept which is very much in our minds to-day—'Resist not evil,' or, 'Resist not him that is evil.' There are some amongst us (and I am not sure whether they are not growing in numbers) who assert that this saying means that on no account are we to use physical force for the overcoming of wrong. We must use it **neither** for offence nor for defence. A Christian nation, they say, must be prepared to endure all things for righteousness, and Britain had far better let a hostile nation come and do its worst, than stain its hands by the shedding of blood.

Now, when we are confronted by an interpretation of this kind, several questions arise in our minds.

1. Is it certain that this is the correct interpretation of the words? For my part I believe that He is speaking a word of counsel to His own countrymen. The Roman power was at that time commonly regarded and spoken of as the embodiment of evil—him that is evil. There was in Palestine a body of men called Zealots, who were fanatically opposed to Rome. They sought to

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stir up the people to win their secular independence. The movement had no semblance of spirituality either in motive or in spirit. It turned the thoughts of the people away from their spiritual sources of strength, and ultimately, as Jesus foresaw, brought upon them the terrible calamity of the destruction of Jerusalem. Christ's precept is a warning to His hearers not to identify themselves with this political movement, which would bring in a purely secular kingdom, but to strive for the realization of a spiritual kingdom by spiritual means. He is not dealing with the question of the use of armed force in general. What He says in effect is, 'The kingdom which the Zealots would bring in is the antithesis of the kingdom which I would bring in. They would simply set up one secular power in place of another. You are deluded if you imagine that the mere overthrow of the Roman power will bring in the Kingdom of God. Therefore do not confuse spiritual and political issues.'

2. But if this interpretation of the words be not accepted, there are further questions that arise. If the words be taken to mean that we must offer no resistance to evil, we ask does this interpretation harmonize with the rest of the teaching of Jesus? If you insist on interpreting the words literally, then interpret them literally. If to Caesar you appeal, to Caesar you must go. The words, taken literally as they stand, mean that you must offer no resistance at all to evil. You have no right to confine their application to the use of

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armed force. The text says, 'Resist not'—therefore you are precluded from offering moral resistance, no less than physical resistance. But such an interpretation is absurd. Christ's whole life was resistance to evil. He came into the world to resist evil. And as to the use of armed force, does not the gospel teach us that we are to defend the weak, and resist the tyrant and oppressor, and do and dare and suffer all things for the defence of truth and righteousness, and the things by which men live? And the teaching of the gospel is confirmed by the witness of our conscience and of all the holiest instincts which God has implanted within us. We should feel that we are traitors to Christ and to our conscience if we stood by and contented ourselves with a passive protest while deeds of iniquity and cruel wrong were wrought upon the defenceless and the weak, and if we did not respond with all our strength and courage to the challenge of those who by brutal force would rob us of the priceless heritage won for us by the heroism, sacrifice, and prayer of many generations. We may hate war as bitterly as the most convinced 'pacifist,' and yet may be compelled to recognize that there are times when force must be met with force. But if the final victory is to be won, more than that is required. It is not enough to defeat and crush evil in the field, it must be vanquished in the minds and hearts of men, ours as well as others. The truth which the Master is expressing in this precept is clearly expressed in what may well be called the

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Pauline paraphrase of it, 'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.' If you interpret the precept 'Resist not evil' as a rule of general application, with strict literalness, you do violence to the whole teaching of Jesus. But if you discover the spiritual significance of the passage, you have found one of the master-principles of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the second place, it can be shown that if we press the literal meaning of Christ's precepts too far, instead of raising, we lower the moral standards of the gospel.

Jesus said, 'Whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.' As Dr. Dale has pointed out, the commandment is not very difficult to carry out literally, if we are persuaded that it is the demand of our Lord, though nothing could be more irritating to an angry man or more calculated to increase his anger than conduct of this kind. But it is infinitely harder to keep the heart free from anger and revenge, and to meet enmity with a spirit of conciliation.

Again, Jesus told us not to lay up treasure on earth. If these words are to be taken literally, barns and banks are condemned. It is easy for most to be spendthrifts, if they are convinced that this is a Christian obligation. But it is quite another thing and much harder to exercise a stewardship of wealth, with due regard to the needs of our family and of others, and at the same time to keep the heart free from covetousness,

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In each of these cases the spiritual interpretation makes higher and more exacting demands than the literal interpretation.

We must enter into the spirit of the teaching of our Lord. He did not come to save us trouble by giving us definite rules of conduct. He came to redeem, to illumine and instruct the conscience. His words convey truths, equally valid in all lands and in all generations, because they are not legal enactments, but spirit and life. He calls us to an understanding of those deep and hidden principles which shine through His words of truth and beauty. He has made us 'ministers, not of the letter, but of the spirit, for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.'

The letter fails, the systems fall,
And every symbol wanes;
The Spirit over-brooding all—
Eternal love—remains.

CHAPTER X

THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

THERE are many pathways to the knowledge of God. Some have found Him in the beauties and glories of nature, and in the wonder of the starry heavens. Some have discovered Him along the pathway of the mystic. They have looked within, and have discovered a ladder of ascent from earth to heaven, and through the stages of purgation and illumination, they have reached the beatific vision. Some have seen God when they have sat at the feet of prophets and saints and seers, and above all when they have committed themselves to Him who is 'the portrait of the unseen God.' Some, again, have realized God most vividly as they have witnessed the unfolding of the Divine Will in history, and as they have watched its slow but resistless advance down the centuries, triumphing over all opposition. These methods of attaining to the knowledge of God are not exclusive. One and the same man may pursue them all. Indeed, it is those who discover that the paths converge who live in the widest and truest vision of God,

One of the marks which differentiated Israel from the nations of the ancient world was that it had a philosophy of history. History was not regarded as a chance concatenation of personalities and events, but as the record of the progressive revelation and realization of the Divine thought and purpose in the field of human life. The Old Testament writers wrote with a motive. Their aim was not merely to chronicle great utterances and events, or to write the biographies of outstanding personalities. The task which they set themselves was to trace the working of God in history. Again and again, we find historian, prophet, and psalmist appealing to the past, and insisting that from it are to be derived understanding and inspiration for the present.

St. Paul pursues this line of argument in the tenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians. He says, 'Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea.' They all started with the same spiritual privileges and opportunities. They had accessible to them the same spiritual meat and drink. But some of them made shipwreck of their lives. The Apostle tells us that these things were written 'for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.' The history of all nations is full of such admonitions. God's will and God's judgements are written plainly across the pages of history, and one of the causes of the tragedies of life is that we read, but do not understand and apply to ourselves that which has been set down.

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History is a Warning to Nations.

Most of us do not feel any deep sense of responsibility for the nation. We are insignificant, and our influence is small. We think that we might as well try to clear away a mountain with a spade as to produce any impression on national policy. When our nation takes a step of which we disapprove, we feel that we are utterly helpless to do anything. And yet there is no such thing as a national mind or conscience or will, apart from that of the individuals who make up the nation. The national conscience is the resultant of the action and reaction of the consciences of individual citizens. Consciously or unconsciously we all do something to make our nation what it is, and to shape its policy. Our action would be more enlightened if we were to approach the duties of citizenship in the light of the lessons of history.

There is no study more fascinating than the story of the nations. There are many ways of writing history. The historian may make the story centre around great personalities, or around revolutionary movements of thought and action, but one of the most interesting and enlightening methods which he can adopt is to unfold the drama of the nations—to show us the several nations appearing on the stage and playing their parts, great or small, and then passing out of the drama.

It is strange how for thousands of years civilization has succeeded civilization and nation has

succeeded nation. A great empire arises which is a pioneer of civilization, and whose might seems impregnable. It endures for a time in all its glory, and then, like the flower of the grass, it withers away, and the grace of the fashion of it perishes. Another takes its place, but, in time, it, too, declines and falls; and so the long succession runs. Two nations may contend with one another. After fierce warfare one emerges victorious, and imposes an unjust peace on the vanquished. 'That issue is settled,' we say. But wait fifty or a hundred or two hundred years, and the tables are turned. The victors and the vanquished have changed places. But nearly always the nations have been blind to the lessons of history. The victors treat the vanquished as they themselves were treated in the day of their defeat, with the result that the wheel of retribution continues to turn, and covers the full circle in due season.

What is the explanation of the rise and fall of nations? How is it that a nation may be exalted to-day and brought low to-morrow? The causes are complex, and are sometimes climatic, sometimes economic, and sometimes military. But there is one cause that always operates, and that is *God in history*. Nations, like individuals, reap as they sow. Injustice and iniquity bring an inevitable, if not speedy, harvest of misery and strife. History proves that, sooner or later, injustice must render an account of itself. Instance after instance can be taken from the history of

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every nation, of which we can say, 'These things were written for our admonition.'

History is a Warning to Individuals.

We read history, not simply for the story of the nations, but for that of individuals. The term history must, of course, be interpreted in a broad sense, and must be taken to include biography and autobiography, journals, and confessions, as well as historical text-books. When we read these documents, we are impressed with the fundamental oneness of human nature in all generations. There is no problem or difficulty or temptation or perplexity which we have to face, with which those who have gone before us did not wrestle. We are not traversing a trackless forest. The pioneers have blazed a path for us, they have put up warnings of hidden perils, and have marked the places where the waters of life spring up. We are not sailing uncharted seas. Successive generations of explorers, who launched their little barques upon the deep, have recorded for us the hidden shoals and sands, they have taught us how to read the stars, and have told us of the land which lies beyond the stormy waste of waters.

Read the records that have come to us of the men and women who trod the way of life before us. If you eliminate references to time and place, to national customs and institutions, the most ancient records seem very modern. Whether we read the story of the illustrious or that of the

obscure, we find the same fierce conflicts, the same deep yearnings, the same victories and defeats, the same warnings and admonitions, and the same encouragements and incentives. The story of the past is the record of wrestlings with temptation, of struggle with the cleaving sins that bring men low, of the tears of shame and penitence, and strong crying and prayers, of broken purposes and unfulfilled endeavours and of lives that have suffered shipwreck. That is true; but, thank God, history is also the record of the joy of victory and the rapture of triumph, of the peace of reconciliation, of the Divine fire that has illumined men's paths, of prayers that have been answered, of fellowship with God, and of growth in holiness. Those who have gone before us have put up danger-signals warning us of hidden pitfalls, of mires and swamps, and of pleasant by-paths, which lead to destruction. They have also blazed for us a straight path, and have built shelters and dug wells for us. They have lit fires which each succeeding generation has replenished, the flames of which both warm our souls and lighten our path.

We are not pioneers in an unexplored waste. We have all history for our chart. We have the examples of our forefathers to warn and to inspire us. The past cries out to us, in accents of deep conviction, that we make shipwreck of our lives unless we come to terms with God. The one star that shines on the darkest and stormiest night is the light of His will, and if we follow it, we

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shall triumph over the darkness and the storm. The one shield that can protect us from the arrows of temptation is the shield of His Spirit. The one power that can subdue the wild beasts within us is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one strength that can renew and restore us is the strength of Him in and through whom we are more than conquerors. These are the admonitions of history.

History admonishes us that we are Heirs of all the Ages.

Paul felt that he and his contemporaries were heirs of all the ages. They had inherited an estate that had been tilled, fertilized, and watered by many generations. It was even then a rich estate. Think of the men who had been labouring on it and enriching it, and who had in faith been sowing what they themselves could never hope to reap. Their names are written in the Old Testament and in the literature of many peoples, and some which are not found there are inscribed in the books of God. Paul may well have been overwhelmed by the splendour of his inheritance. But since his day many generations have come and gone. Many have sown and planted and watered. Many have laboured, leaving it to others to enter into their labour. The last nineteen centuries have been richer in faith and love and goodness and sacrifice and service than any in the history of humanity. A glorious succession of saints, martyrs, prophets, reformers,

pioneers, and philanthropists have toiled on the estate, to its infinite enrichment. Upon us the ends of the ages are come. We are heirs of all the ages; we have indeed a goodly heritage. We are heirs of all the aspirations, strivings, triumphs, visions, faith, sacrifice, and love of the long procession of the generations. They look to us to reap what they have sown, to finish what they began, to vindicate their faith in the fulfilment of the promises, to avoid the snares into which they fell, to see that their sacrifices were not made in vain, and to carry their triumphs to larger and wider issues. 'They apart from us shall not be made perfect.'

Yes, we have a great inheritance. All the lessons and all the treasures of human experience are at our disposal; all the wisdom of the ages is ours to draw upon. All the records of the past were written for our admonition and inspiration. The whole history of the past is a solemn exhortation to us to turn to God and to live in obedience to His holy will. The history of the last nineteen centuries admonishes us that Jesus Christ is the one central hope of our poor wayward race, and that our fairest hopes and noblest dreams for ourselves and for humanity can be realized in and through Him.

CHAPTER XI

CHARACTER AND CONDUCT

THE hireling fleeth because he is a hireling,' said our Lord. That is to say, conduct is the expression of character. Jesus draws a contrast between the Good Shepherd, who loves and cares for the sheep, and the hireling who watches over them perfunctorily, because he is paid to do it. When the hour of danger comes, the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep, but the hireling fleeth *because he is a hireling*. Each acts according to his nature. Conduct is the expression of character.

1. *The explanation of what we do is to be found in what we are.*

If the tree brings forth good fruit, it is because it is a good tree; if it brings forth bad fruit, it is because it is a bad tree.

Someone has said that character is 'a completely fashioned will.' But behind the will is desire. Our wills are moved into action by our desires. What we desire depends on what we like, and what we like is an exact expression of what we are. The hunger and thirst for righteousness which possesses one man, the hunger for power

which possesses another, the thirst for fame which consumes another, is in each case a revelation of what the man is.

A man's real life is his inner life, and that life is lived in a certain universe of thought and desire. It is not meant that any man dwells continually in one inner universe. On the contrary, he makes excursions to other universes, but there is always one which he looks upon as his dwelling-place, and which is his home. We say of a particular individual—'the ruling passion of his life was such and such.' What we mean is that he dwelt in a certain universe of thought and desire, and that his actions had their source therein. Two men may live in the same house and yet they may dwell in worlds that are an infinitude apart. One may live and move and have his being in an atmosphere of pure, holy, unselfish, and chivalrous desire. The other may be animated by desires that are selfish and petty, and mean and base. They climb the same stairs, but one has his dwelling-place in the stars, while the other exists in the dens and caves of the earth. And if you want to know which is the superior character, ask the neighbours. The miser shuts his ears to the call of compassion, not because he thinks that charity is wasteful, though he may think so, but because he is a miser. He dwells in a universe in which everything is made of gold, and in which nothing is of value which cannot be turned into gold. The voluptuary plunges into vice, not because he yields to sudden temptation, but be-

cause he is a voluptuary. He dwells in an atmosphere of lust and passion and unholy desire, which is to him the very breath of life.

The philanthropist acts generously, not merely because his heart is touched, but because he is a philanthropist. He dwells in a world of love and unselfishness and consideration, and his deeds are the expression of his outlook on life.

The missionary goes to China, not because his society sends him, but because he *is* a missionary, because in his heart there burn the fires of a holy passion to bring the whole world into the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The explanation of what we do is to be found in what we are. If as we look at our conduct, we are humble and contrite, it is not enough to say, 'I will alter this or that action.' We must say, 'I will alter *myself*. I will make an inward journey. I will leave the land of my old desires and will go forth to a new world where new thoughts and aspirations and ambitions shall be my companions.'

When men are seeking after reformation of life, one of the first expedients which they usually adopt is to break with their old surroundings. Their old haunts and their old friends know them no more. They move to another neighbourhood, seek to establish new relations, new friendships, and new modes of life. But that is not enough. If we are to achieve our purpose, we must break with our inner surroundings. The old haunts of

thought and desire must know us no more. We must move to a new inward neighbourhood, and forsake the companions with whom we held inner communion. We must establish new inner relations. 'The hireling fleeth because he is a hireling.' The good shepherd lives in another world, and gives his life for the sheep.

2. *Our character does not so much reveal what we are, as what we are in process of becoming.*

Character is not fixed; it is more or less fluid. We can discover tendencies that move towards fixity, but not absolute fixity. There can be no doubt that character hardens as we get older, and some men's characters seem to be so fixed and rigid that we feel as though we can prophesy with absolute certainty what they will do in given circumstances. But it is doubtful whether character is ever absolutely and irrevocably fixed in this world. There are inconsistencies in the actions of all of us, which can only be traced back to lack of fixity of character. No man dwells entirely in one universe of thought and desire. He sometimes wanders almost unawares into other worlds, and then his actions are perplexing. There is an element of the unexpected in them.

This is an explanation of inconsistencies in the characters of good men. There may be a man whose actions are usually honourable and straightforward, but one day you are surprised to find him guilty of a mean and petty act. In your wrath you denounce him as a hypocrite, but you are not necessarily right. It may be that he has

wandered away from the universe in which he habitually lives, to some lower and less wholesome universe. When he acted basely, he was dominated by the laws and atmosphere of that lower universe. Now he has found his way back again to that nobler universe in which he usually lives, and he is ashamed of his mean action.

So, also, we often find good deeds emanating from unexpected quarters. The miser may do a generous deed. You are stupefied when you hear of it, and can hardly believe that the report is true. You examine the circumstances, and see whether, despite his apparent generosity, he was not animated by a selfish motive. But you fail to find one. You are driven to the conclusion that on this occasion he was animated by pure generosity. You began to hope that his character has changed. But to-morrow he is as miserly as ever. The force of gravitation, drawing him back to his old universe, is too strong for him. But is not the whole incident full of hope? It means that once, at any rate, the miser has escaped from the universe in which he habitually dwells, into a nobler universe. What has happened once may happen again and again until he is able to defy the forces of gravity of the old universe, and becomes subject to a new law of gravitation.

The fanatic has been known, on rare occasions, to show tolerance and charity. It means that for once, at least, he has broken away from the tyranny of his own point of view, and has caught a glimpse of other points of view. That is to say,

even his gloomy, repellant, and intolerant character is not fixed.

A soldier may be selfish, and entirely deficient in *esprit de corps*. In the camp or in the trenches, he may be unwilling to inconvenience himself in the least, either for his platoon or for a comrade. But in action, face to face with the foe, he may fight with a single eye to the interests of his battalion, and may even deliberately lay down his life for a friend. What has happened? Under the stress of the emotion of the hour, he has broken away from his old universe, and has entered a new one. For the time being, at any rate, he is inhabiting a new universe, and is subject to new laws. You were wrong when you said that his character was fixed. There were other possibilities latent within him, which, in the supreme hour, triumphed over those realities which we called his character.

Even the hireling may prove himself to be something more than a hireling. He may have worked for wages—and for wages only—all his days, displaying no interest in or love for his work. In the hour of danger he may start to flee. Then suddenly something happens within him. He turns and faces the wolf, and lays down his life for the sheep. In that brief moment, he passed from the universe of self to that of self-sacrifice, and he became a new creation.

That is the psychological explanation of what we call *sudden conversion*. Many pour scorn upon it, but psychologists recognize it to be a true and

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valid experience. The man passes, in a moment, from a lower universe of thought and desire, to a higher, and *he stays there*. That is the crucial fact. He passes from the kingdom of sin into the Kingdom of God, from the realm of selfishness into that of unselfishness, from the state of impure desire to that of holy desire—and *he stays there*. Much of the tragedy of life springs from the fact that the journey of many from the lower to the higher is but a transitory visit. They do not stay there. They respond to the gravitation of the old world and fall back to the place from which they had risen.

The problem before us is how to make our dwelling in the highest universe of thought and desire, permanent and abiding. That is the problem which Jesus Christ helps us to solve. He destroys the old point of view and gives us a new one. He drives out the old affections and fills the heart with new affections. He subjugates the old and base desires, and brings us into captivity to new and holy desires. He lifts us up with Him into the heavenly places, and if we cling to Him, He will hold us there. We shall be able to defy the old forces of gravitation that drag us back to earth, and we shall respond to new forces of spiritual gravitation, which draw us ever upward through new universes of thought and new worlds of desire to the very throne of God.

Whether our character is good or evil, or, as is more probable, a mixture of both, it is not *fixed*. There are tendencies that are dominant in us, and

our normal actions spring from them. What we do is a revelation of what we are. But there are also in us other tendencies, which sometimes reveal themselves, and even of our abnormal and exceptional actions it is true that what we do is a revelation of what we are. There are infinite possibilities in every one of us, and the way to their realization is never closed. The man who inhabits the lowest or the middle universes of thought and desire, may, by the help of Christ, rise to the highest, *and stay there.*

We need a new and greater faith in the spiritual nature of man, and in his power to rise and soar with the saving help of Christ. The spirit of man has achieved great triumphs over the material world. In our life-time he has conquered a new element—that of the air. If any one had said a hundred years ago that man would fly, he would have been laughed to scorn. It was said that man was not a flying animal. But, as someone has put it, ‘if he were only an animal, he would not be flying now. It is the spirit that gives him those material wings.’ And shall not the spirit give him spiritual wings, on which, supported and guided by Christ, he shall rise to new worlds of thought and desire, and come within the orbit of new suns and moons and stars?

Man’s victory over the world with its sins and wrongs, must be won within, not without. Hirelings must become good shepherds. The old universe with its faithless fears, false values, wrong maxims, and deceitful desires must be left

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behind, and we must rise to that new world in which our hopes and values and maxims and desires shall be those of the Good Shepherd, who gave His life for the sheep.

CHAPTER XII

FINDING OUR PLACE

IN school every one finds his own place. Whether in class, or in games, or in general opinion and esteem, each boy places himself. It is so, too, in the School of Life. The early disciples said of Judas Iscariot that he had gone 'to his own place.' The figure of Judas is of pathetic and tragic interest. There has been much discussion as to his destiny. But we do best to imitate the restraint of the disciples. He went *to his own place*. This much we can, however, say. The period of our Lord's intercourse with the Twelve was a time of struggle for the soul of Judas. He had originally a place in the spiritual order. There must have been great possibilities for good in him, or the Master would not have chosen him to be one of the Twelve. Christ called him to a place in the ministry and apostleship for which his intellectual and spiritual gifts fitted him. Outwardly he occupied that place for a time. But his volition ran counter to the Divine election, and he went to his own place. But he went there inwardly long before he went there outwardly.

The problem of destiny is to establish ourselves in our true place in the spiritual order.

1. *God calls every man to a place in the spiritual order.*

To every man God has given a spiritual nature. Each man is created to live in and for God. The heritage of the things that are high and holy and true is our birthright. Beautiful thoughts, holy deeds, lovely characters—these are not things that are alien to man; they belong to him in virtue of his kinship to God. If he lack them, he has either surrendered his birthright or been robbed of it.

Every one of us has his God-appointed place in the spiritual order, and each has his own allotted task. This is a statement difficult to prove. But it will be understood and believed by those who have a sense of vocation. Those who are conscious of God's guidance in their lives, know that they have their own work to do; and if they neglect or shirk it, it goes undone, for the time being, at any rate. Every single life, however insignificant, has a place in the spiritual order, and a part to discharge.

In the spiritual order there are all manner of ranks and grades and conditions—diversity of gifts and of operations, but the same spirit. Let us call to mind some of them.

There are those rare, elect souls, who are pioneers in the spiritual life of humanity. They are seers of visions and dreamers of dreams. Their gaze penetrates the veil that hides the unseen. With outstretched hands and strained vision, they catch a glimpse of the gleaming towers of the City of God, and their cry to their fellows is, 'For-

ward into light.' They are the creators of new epochs, the pioneers of progress, the heralds of the dawn.

Then there are those who are mighty in prayer. They are in the world, and go about their daily tasks with faithfulness, but their abiding dwelling-place is in the secret place of the Most High. They have learnt the secret of spiritual power. Their names are often unknown to their fellows, and are not inscribed on the roll of the men of action whom the world reveres; but they are at the very centre of the energies which move the world, and are purifying the springs of action.

Again, there are those who are pioneers of character. They bring forth in their lives the beautiful fruit of the Spirit. They make the world fragrant with love, pity, humility, purity, courage, and brave endurance. These are not all learned or mighty or noble. They may be found by the thousand, in the lowliest walks of life, doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God, and are the salt of the earth, which keeps humanity from festering corruption.

Once again, there are those who can be designated the servants of humanity. I am thinking of those who are not very much given to speculation or contemplation. They are not great thinkers; but they are great doers. You will find them in the haunts of wickedness and shame, and in the abodes of suffering and sorrow. They seek no glory for themselves. Their happiness is to labour out of sight, seeking, like their

Master, not to be ministered unto but to minister, and earning the benediction pronounced on those who give a cup of cold water to the least of the Master's brethren.

This is not an exhaustive list, and the various classes overlap. I have presented types of those who comprise the hierarchy of the spiritual order.

It is our instinct to arrange these men in ranks and grades, to call some great and others small, to cherish the names of some and to forget those of others. But 'all service ranks the same with God,' and the names, illustrious and obscure, are all written in the same book—the Lamb's book of life. Who does not see that there is a place for each one of us in this Divine Order of the children of the Spirit?

2. *Every man chooses his own place in the spiritual order.*

We have been considering the Divine will for men, but human volition must be taken into account, and the fact must be faced that every man chooses his own place.

Look at the case of Judas. Christ gave him a place of privilege in the new spiritual order which He came to establish, and we are bound to assume that at first he was not unfitted for his high position. He was one of the Twelve, privileged to live in daily intercourse with the Master, to hear the truths that fell from His lips, and to catch the inspiration of His holy example. He was to be one of the founders of the new kingdom, an apostle of the truth that was destined to make

men righteous and free. That was the spiritual order to which he belonged outwardly for three years, but as Jesus very well knew, he had ceased to belong to it inwardly for a long time before the tragic end came. 'Judas went out, and it was night,' says one writer, but it was night within him long before he went forth from the fellowship of the Upper Room to do his deed of treachery. 'Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place,' but he had gone to his own place long before his tortured conscience drove him to take his own life. What was his place? Was it hell? Yes. Was it an outward hell? Yes. But it was first of all an inward hell, and it was the inward hell that made the outward hell. Because there was hell within him, he found this world a hell, from which he fled by violence, and he found the world beyond a hell. Even the highest heaven is hell if there be hell within the soul.

What then was Judas' place? It was the place of covetousness, of callousness to love human and divine, of treachery. It was his own soul, not his Master, that Judas sold for thirty pieces of silver. When we know these things we do not need to ask what is Judas' place in the universe. There is no need for a tribunal to sit in judgement and to pronounce its solemn verdict. He has placed himself. He has gone to his own place. There is no more to be said.

What is true of Judas is true of us all. Every one of us goes to his own place, both here and

hereafter. We are placing ourselves by our thoughts and actions every day. It is our character and our relationship to God that determine our place in the eternal order. We are all of us greatly concerned about our place in this temporal order, and our concern is natural. There are ambitions that are pure and legitimate, and it is the business of each one of us to make the best use of our powers. But the matter of supreme importance is our place in the eternal order—the order that endures when the seen and the temporal have passed away. If we could only see how men are placed in that order, we should discover some strange reversals of the positions that obtain on earth. Did not Jesus say, ‘Many that are first shall be last, and last first’?

If we will only use the power of vision which we possess, we can see into the eternal order now, even though it be through a glass darkly. The sensualist, the miser, the hypocrite, the compassionless, the man who battens on human frailty and grows rich by taking advantage of human need, to mention only a few—we do not need to ask what their place is. They have gone to their own place. They are in hell already.

And on the other hand—the good, the true, the pure, the just. Do you want to know what their place is? Do you want to hear a tribunal pronouncing judgement? No, they have placed themselves. They have gone to their own place. That place is heaven, now as well as hereafter.

What is true of the present is true also of the

future. The judgements of God are not arbitrary. Every man goes to his own place—the place for which he is spiritually fitted. We sometimes hear the question asked, ‘How did so-and-so die?’ The question is not wholly irrelevant, for if his past cannot be wholly undone on his death-bed, his heart can be changed even then by surrender to the transforming love of God. But in the great majority of cases, it would be more to the point to ask—how did he live? What was the place in which he loved to dwell? He has gone to his own place.

People sometimes speculate as to whether their departed friends are in heaven or hell. It is misguided speculation. The only thing that we can say with our limited knowledge is that each man has gone to his own place—the place for which he is spiritually fitted, the place in which he will see as much or as little of the vision of God as he is capable of beholding, the place where sin’s iniquity is revealed and its final consequences are borne.

God’s judgements are not arbitrary. He loves all men, and seeks to bring all into the place of fellowship with and likeness to Him. But even God cannot win the love and obedience of a man, or change his character, without his own consent. We choose and shape our own destiny. Our character and disposition determine the place we occupy in the eternal order. We go to our own place.

3. *Every man may change his place now.*

That is the message of grace of the gospel. If it be asked whether a man may change his place in the eternal order after death, only an agnostic answer may be given. No one who reads his New Testament, comparing passage with passage, will dogmatize. The question is one the answer to which has not been revealed. But if the future is hidden from us, we can speak with confident certainty as to the present. By the power of Jesus Christ, we can change our place *now*. Why defer to the uncertain future, what we can achieve here and now?

Even Judas might have changed his place in the eternal order, right up to the eleventh hour. Read the story of the gathering in the Upper Room. It is, of course, given to us in a very condensed form. But it is not difficult to see how the Master sought by tender words and words of rebuke to make clear to Judas that the way of repentance was open. But Judas was obdurate. With hardened heart and perverse will, he went to his own place.

The message of the gospel is that wherever or whatever you are you can change your place, by the power of Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian can change his skin and the leopard his spots. The age of miracles is not past. Christ can and will translate you into the Divine Kingdom. He will give you strength for righteousness, and through Him you will find God. You will find your place in the eternal order, and it will be a place of

holiness and peace and joy in God. You will go to your own place, the place into which you have been redeemed. 'Let not your heart be troubled. . . . I go to prepare a place for you.'

